

AFRICOM and the USA's Hidden Battle for Africa

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What is the current meaning of “War against Terror” for Africa? The true intention of America’s recent military interventions in the African continent (both covert and open) is nothing other than the expansion and consolidation of Western capital.

It all started in 2001 when George W. Bush declared his “War on Terror” in the continent, but has developed in a manner that has gone beyond human imagination in the body counts on the streets of Somalia, in the jungles of Uganda and Congo, and deserts of Sudan.

The chief of the US African Command, General E. Ward, explained this in language more clear than that of any US politician when he stated that an Africa in which “African populations are able to provide for themselves, contribute to global economic development and are allowed access to markets in free, fair, and competitive ways, is good for America and the world...”

AFRICOM (or USAFRICOM) is a Unified Combatant Command of the US Department of Defense, responsible for US military operations and military relations with 53 African nations (excepting Egypt). Africa Command was established October 1, 2007, and formally activated October 1, 2008 at a public ceremony at the Pentagon attended by representatives of African nations. It has become clear that the idea was not primarily to fight against Islamic terror, which was said to be growing in influence, but to protect and help expand American military and economic (mainly energy) interests.

Pending legislation, “The Lord’s Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act 2009,” being pushed by Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA) would empower AFRICOM not only to give technical support but to physically go to war with the armed groups that both Uganda and the Democratic Republic of Congo Forces have not been able to dislodge. Royce said:

“Africa’s emerging potential as a major oil producer and supplier to the United States, has been of interest to the Sub-Committee on Africa that I’ve chaired for some time. The sub-committee held a hearing to look at this topic in 2000. It’s clearly in our national interest to diversify our energy supply, especially given the turbulent political climate in key parts of the world today. The expansion of energy production in Africa matches to that interest...”

This is big money talk rather than humanitarian outrage. On January 2, 2002, a Washington DC symposium held to discuss African oil came up with a document entitled “African Oil: A Priority for US National Security and African Development,” which paved the way for the rest to happen. It was attended by Washington’s Africa heavyweights: people like Barry Schutz, a Bush administration specialist on Africa; Lt-Col. Karen Kwiatkowski, a high-ranking Air Force officer, and Water Kansteiner, Bush’s under-secretary of State for African Affairs. The

Christian Science Monitor reported on the Symposium thus:

“In January last year [2002], the IASPS [Institute for Advanced Strategic and Political Studies] hosted a symposium in Houston, Texas, which was attended by government and oil industry representatives. An influential working group called the African Oil Policy Initiative Group (AOPIG) co-chaired by IASPS researchers Barry Schutz and Paul Michael Wihbey, which has been largely responsible for driving American governmental policy concerning west African oil, emerged from the symposium... The document urges Congress and the Bush administration to encourage greater extraction of oil across Africa, and to declare the Gulf of Guinea ‘a area of vital interest’ to the US.”

We have now definitely entered the aggressive birth of AFRICOM. The man who is put in charge of this task, Gen. William E. “Kip” Ward, is not new to the battlefields of Africa. He was in Somalia in 1993 when US forces were seriously bitten by small insurgent groups, forcing the US to withdraw from that crisis.

AFRICOM in Action

AFRICOM justifies its presence in Africa on its website as follows:

“Africa is growing in military, strategic and economic importance in global affairs. However, many nations on the African continent continue to rely on the international community for assistance with security concerns. From the US perspective, it makes strategic sense to help build the capability for African partners, and organizations such as the African Standby Force, to take the lead in establishing a security environment. This security, will, in turn, set the groundwork for increased political stability and economic growth.”

This helps explain why the AFRICOM budget rose from \$50 million in the fiscal year of 2007 to \$310 million in FY 2009 fiscal year 2010 in running costs, not military aid to the member countries. It also shows the significance of this program for the US government. The command gave the US military the possibility of having a physical presence in numerous African countries and assigning Defense Department personnel to US embassies and diplomatic missions to coordinate Defense Department programs. The US Africa Command is now spending billions in training and arm supplies. It is expecting to spend nothing less than \$20 billion in 2010, and this will benefit the armies of a very many repressive regimes.

Take the case of Sudan. Openly, Western governments, including the US, have never been more critical of the regime in Khartoum, even accusing it of committing genocide in Darfur. The fact that the head of Sudan’s intelligence agency, wanted by the International Criminal Court, was secretly jetted to the US by the CIA to discuss military interests in the Horn of Africa was one of the most disgusting acts of hypocrisy by the Bush administration.

The right-wing Republican lobbyists for AFRICOM never made their intentions secret. They have said time and again that America cannot rely on the unconquered Middle East for its oil supply; for them, Africa is the answer. But the aggressive nature of this thirst for African oil and other resources has no doubt also been fueled by the presence of China in key strategic areas.

Today, US Africa Command is involved in almost 38 African countries with the presumed agenda of training anti-terrorist forces. These include Chad, Kenya, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Tanzania, and Sierra Leone. The expansion of the AFRICOM central command in

Djibouti adds to the significance that the US government puts into this project. According to AFRICOM, "US Central Command maintains its traditional relationship with Egypt, but AFRICOM coordinates with Egypt on issues relating to Africa security." In Egypt, the US state is spending billions of American tax payers' money in military equipment and training to arm one of the most repressive military forces in the continent. All of this speaks for itself rather than the simple and cheap rhetoric of bringing stability to the continent in the name of the "war against terror."

The 2006 invasion of Somalia by the Ethiopian forces was clearly a proxy war, with AFRICOM providing the logistics allowing a criminal organization like al-Shabab to claim a legitimate reason for its war and brutal terror against the very people both sides claim to be freeing: the poor ordinary Somalis. It is significant that as debate was held on where the headquarters of AFRICOM should be located, the Ethiopian Prime Minister Meles Zenawi declared that Ethiopia will be willing to work closely with the Command. According to a UN situation report of February 5, 2010, an estimated 3.2 million people in Somalia are in need of emergency food aid, one in six children are seriously malnourished, and the internally displaced population is in the millions and continues to rise.

The planned assault on Mogadishu has registered its first civilian casualties this March, forcing more civilians to flee the capital. The aim of this military operation is to retake control of the capital from the al-Shabab militants. The Obama administration has been planning this assault for a while now. Assistant secretary of state for Africa, Johnnie Carlson is said to have been very instrumental in the preparation. He nonetheless said: "This is not an American offensive... the US military is not on the ground in Somalia. Full stop." In another press briefing Carlson held with the Ertharin Cousin, US ambassador to the UN Mission in Rome, he said: "We have provided limited military support to the Transitional Federal Government... We do so in the firm belief that the TFG seeks to end the violence in Somalia that is caused by al-Shabaab and other extremist organizations..."

True, there might not be any US troops on the ground, but it is an American war contracted to some Somalis, African Union forces, and Ethiopians. The US has been training intelligence forces, providing surveillance, logistic support and money to buy bullets and guns; and there are even speculations that American forces might provide aerial bombing of militant positions.

This is against the recent advice given to the Obama administration, which warns of a need for a change of approach from US support to the Transitional Federal Government headed by Sheik Ahmed Sharif. The Report, "Somali: A New Approach," prepared by the Council on Foreign Relations, advised the administration to engage in "Constructive Disengagement" rather than spending so much on ineffective government that has very little support among the Somali population. Critics might be right to say that the Obama administration is playing into the hands of the Islamic extremists.

This was the case too with "Operation Lightning Thunder" in 2008, involving Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the liberated Southern Sudan.

It was clear to all sincere analysts that the Lord's Resistance Army was cornered and pacified, and that operation "Lightning Thunder" was no more than the clearing of the oil fields. Dr. Jendayi Frazer, then an assistant secretary of state in the Bush government, was said to have been the main initiator of that operation. Riek Machar, vice president of Southern Sudan, said as much in a documentary aired by the Aljazeera TV. Ugandan military

commanders have openly confirmed that they have received logistics support from the Americans, including satellite phones, GPS receivers, maps and US contributions to fuel costs of the military vehicles involved in the operation. The results: over 1,000 civilians dead and the internal displacement of an estimated half million people. All this followed the 2006 failed operation by a UN team of US-trained Guatemalan commando to assassinate Joseph Kone, leader of LRA in which all members of the commando were killed by the LRA. Southern Sudan refused to actively take part, only closing their borders to avoid crossing of arm groups into their territory.

Conclusion

When the Chad-Cameroon pipeline project was put on the table in the prelude to AFRICOM's unveiling, the oil companies made sure of IMF and World Bank support. This was not because of lack of capital. These two institutions are the most reliable and effective discipliners of the African nations involved should they at any time violate the contract against the interest of the big oil companies involved in the project. The arrangement was never designed for transparency, and when the initial funds of the project were embezzled in the member countries there was never a call to halt the project even though the World Bank had put in a code of conduct as condition for the funding.

There is nothing new in armies conquering territories before the looting begins. For centuries states have been using their armies in foreign adventures in the interest of capital. The modern world has just surpassed the crude methods that were used in centuries past, and is now utilizing sophisticated techniques consciously designed to confuse the human mind. With the "moral high ground" of free market capitalism, the African bourgeoisie are content with being sub-contractors; the whole mathematics becomes easier, especially when it comes to the "ethical sharing" of the wealth from the looting. To say that Africans are benefitting from the project through employment and the creation of a middle class are fine words that defy the lawlessness and suffering on the continent.

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